

State Board of Health, news release

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Children's Health and Well-Being: **Are South Sound Children at Risk?**

An early start is the best start! Parents can make all the difference in their children's lives by being sure their kids receive the right set of health checks and the earliest possible interventions for any problems that may turn up. The Washington State Board of Health is ready to approve a list of the health screenings needed for all children from birth to age 10.

Olympia, November 8, 2000: The Washington State Board of Health invites you to attend a public hearing to agree on what clinical preventive services all children should receive. The forum is open to the public and begins at 9:15 a.m. at the Ramada Inn Governor House, Olympia, WA.

State Board of Health officials, the President of the Washington State Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics, the State Health Officer and other Medical Directors will be present to discuss the list of health screenings needed for all children from birth to age 10. A local perspective will be given by CHOICE Regional Health Network and a panel of family doctors and pediatricians regarding what preventive services should be guaranteed to all children birth to ten and what will happen if a fragile primary care system deteriorates to the point where there aren't health care providers available to provide these services on a routine basis close to where people live.

"Parents can make all the difference in their children's lives by being sure their kids receive the right set of health checks and the earliest possible interventions for any problems that may turn up. An early start is the best start," said Vickie Ybarra, State Board of Health Member and Director of Planning & Development Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic. The Washington State Board of Health is an independent citizen board appointed by the Governor.

Children in low-income families are at the greatest risk of increasingly not having access to the preventive services the State Board of Health considers critical to their well-being. The state average of uninsured individuals is approximately 12%, but is higher in the five county region of Thurston, Grays

Harbor, Lewis, Mason and Pacific counties. There are approximately 31,000 children without insurance; and another 13,600 children on Medicaid. Research indicates that people without insurance are less likely to seek preventive care and have less continuity of care than insured people. Even children with health insurance may not be getting the necessary health screenings.

Many attempts have been made to define the minimum set of health care services that should be available to all members of the community – regardless of the type of provider or funding source. Although the definition of “critical health care service” remains the subject of debate, a working “core set of standards” was set forth in the 1999 “Proposed Standards for Public Health in Washington State”. But are these standards at risk as a result of State changes in health care contracting? The forum will address how rural areas in the South Sound region may not be able to continue current services for low-income children beyond January 2001.

“We know what works, but not all children will get this care. By 2001, we need to measure how many children are receiving this comprehensive care, and when it’s received,” said Don Sloma, Executive Director, Board of Health. “We are seeking ways to provide necessary service within our financial constraints based on the most current research. It is a complex task.”

CHOICE Regional Health Network, a nonprofit consortium of rural and urban health partners, shares the State Board of Health’s goal to improve access to health care services in Thurston, Lewis, Mason, Gray’s Harbor, and Pacific counties. Kristen West, Executive Director of CHOICE, will be presenting innovative ideas for major system reform so that access to critical health services can be sustained over time.

Understanding how fragile the health care system is, particularly in rural areas, and the potential threats to access are the first steps in making the difference for our children’s health and well-being. All children need a health care provider to watch and help them develop, grow and change. Parents need to know what their children need and when they need it. Providers and insurers, including public payers, need to make sure they are seeing the children on time. Schools want children to be healthy and ready to learn at school.

For more information about the questions and issues being addressed at the public forum call 360-236-4104.

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